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A CONTRAST OF THE TEACHING PROCEDURES IN THE
TRADITIONAL SCHOOL WITH THAT OF THE ACTIVITY SCHOOL

By

Ella Mae Sleet West

A Thesis in Education Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science

in the

Division of Arts and Sciences

of the

Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College

Prairie View, Texas

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DEDICATION

To my dear mother, Ella Sleet, who
has always been faithful and ready to
guide me at all times.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The writer is indebted to Miss A. C. Preston, teacher of Rural Education, Prairie View College, Prairie View, Texas, and Miss Kathryn M. Wright, Lufkin, Texas, a graduate of Prairie View College.

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INTRODUCTION

There has been quite a heated discussion of the new philosophy of education. The idea has been gradually emerging since the time of Plato, but not until recently has it been accepted by teachers. The problem is, shall we educate for life, or shall education be itself a process of good living? Dewey held at the beginning of the century¹ that education is not a preparation for life but it is life.

It has taken a third of a century to realize that the school curriculum should be mainly concerned with engaging in activities through which subject matter may be learned rather than teaching the traditional school subjects directly. The child is not regarded as a species of an empty reservoir to be filled as economically and effectively as possible, but as a living creature of endlessly diversified possibilities in activity and behavior.² After much travail and labor various laboratory and progressive schools have come into existence.

Within the past few decades definite changes have taken place in American life profoundly affecting the activities of individuals. The individual of today must as a citizen of America, be able to cope with the changed and changing community, state and national life. Running parallel to this change has been the lessening child training responsibility within the home due to the withdrawal of parents from the home to factories and stores, yet the child was not to be neglected since the

1 Stomzand & McKee. The Progressive Primary Teacher. p. 1
Houghton Mifflin, New York. p. 1

2 Stomz & McKee. The Progressive Primary Teacher. p. 1

child is "Father to the man," and his education and training must prepare for the future man. Thus education, with its broadening responsibility to meet changing needs, became education for a Democracy, or education based on needs and interests of the child.

The objectives. Health, worthy home membership, command of the fundamental processes, vocation, citizenship, use of leisure time and ethical character though definitely applicable to Secondary Schools, form the basis for teaching in Primary and Elementary Schools as well.

This thesis is concerned with the changed and changing methods used in teaching in primary grades. It shall have as its chief purpose the contrasting of the old and the new types of teaching used therein, in an effort to critically analyze each. References made to the traditional school is to that school of "subjects" in which "teaching, instructing and knowledge of subject matter were essential elements."¹ On the other hand the activity school may be defined as the school whose program is based on needs and consists of experiences which uses subject-matter but does not consist wholly of subject matter.²

In this thesis the writer intends to first set up the differences between the traditional and activity school and secondly, to contrast her actual procedures within both types.

This study shall be limited to primary grades, and schools in the rural districts since the writer has only had experience in traditional and activity schools of the rural district.

It was noted that although the new type program has been carefully

1 Mead, C. D., and Orth, F. W. The Transitional Public School. Pp 64-65

2. Lowth, F. J. Everyday Problems of the Country Teacher. Pp 403-405

defined by Dewey, Kilpatrick, Horn and in numerous books few theses have been written in which personal experience has been used to make a contrast. Further it was noted that numerous rural teachers do not use the new type procedure. For these and many other reasons the writer deems this thesis advisable and hopes that it will lend worthwhile suggestions and incentives to other rural teachers.

CHAPTER I.

HOW THE SCHOOL ACTIVITY PROGRAM CAME TO BE

Development of the Activity School. The activity school, as with other plans, projects, or endeavors that now stand as tangible markers, is an outgrowth of theory and experimentation.

John Dewey has been given the credit for starting the idea of a "school for work instead of listening," but previous to that, teachers and pupils knew only a formal learning.

The Traditional School. It was the school where the child sat for a long tiresome day in almost the same position. Each day brought him the same routine of work. Every day at the same hour he read his lesson complacently, often without understanding or interest. The day itself was divided into ten, fifteen and twenty-five minute periods, whose sum total marked a complete mastery of the subject matter for the day. The time was thus apportioned so that certain grades could be completed in the required time.

The child's recitations were bookish and verbal. Listening and silence were cultivated. The program was artificial instead of natural and teachers often complained of too much work. This type of school could not continue to exist for some wide awake teachers gradually noted the monotony and pupils were often listless.

The Experimental School:- The traditional school, however, met its first outward opposition in John Dewey, who attempted the first

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laboratory or as it is termed, experimental school. Through this experimental school the feasibility of progressive trends and movements was proved advisable.

After Dewey opened the first of these Experimental Schools many others sprang up. The Francis W. Parker School in Chicago, The Speyer and Horace Mann School, Play School of the University of California, various city and country schools, the Beaver Country Day School, Ojar Valley, California, and others. One of the earliest and best of them launched about twenty-five years ago, was the University of Missouri Elementary School, under the direction of Meriam.¹

This leader constructed his curriculum in terms of concrete everyday activities of pupils rather than in terms of generalizations,² such as was found in traditional schools.

The experimental school was centered around four main activities: observation, play, stories and hand work. The observations were made of immediate life and nature, local and world wide activities and industries. The play consisted of ordinary children's games, machinery, electricity or on any field of endeavor. Stories were told and dramatized of useful and every day things and handwork consisted of artistic and useful things. The teachers in these schools were to formulate problems in the way to help boys and girls better participate in all the wholesome activities in which they were normally engaged. The experimental school, although it did not secure perfect results at first, acted as a laboratory for improvement and its principles gradually became accepted by educators. With this acceptance grew the activity school, where these principles

1 Meriam, J. L. Child Life and Curriculum. Pp 382-383

2 Ibid. p 382-383

1

became a definite part of the school program.

The Activity School:- An examination of the principles and theories upon which the activity school operates shows its difference and relative superiority over the traditional school. The characteristics: of the new school are:

1. Long intervals which are made possible through opportunities for greater activity and variety in work.
2. Programs divided into fewer divisions.
3. Long intervals of related activities rather than numerous short periods.
4. Flexibility in the program.

The teacher is free to make readjustments as needs arise, sufficient time is frequently taken from other subjects, but the teacher must be careful not to consume too much time for any one thing. In such an organization provision is made for group and individual activities giving an opportunity for developing responsibility, initiative, co-operation, social and scientific attitudes. In the activity school we have both subjects and unit work, arithmetic, spelling, geography and other subjects form a part of the program in which the unit of work is carried into an activity program organized partly in subject matter and in unit work.

Out of subject matter it is expected that project activities of pupils will grow. The schedule should always be governed according to the child's interest.

The program of the two schools may best be contrasted by a review of their captions.

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1. Meriam, J. L. Child Life and Curriculum. Pp 382-383
 2. Mead, C. D. and Orth, F. W. The Transitional School. New York. The MacMillan Co. Pp 64-65

Advantages and Disadvantages: The activity program has an advantage over the traditional program in that it plans for these differences.

Through the use of homelike equipped classrooms, unit methods of planning and project methods of presentation the child is able to make adjustments. The unit may be thought of as the knowledge or skill or appreciation to be acquired. The unit assignment may then be viewed as the pupils experiences or activities needed to achieve knowledge, skill or appreciation. This unit plan not only stimulates better learning but increased interest is manifested.¹

The project too, since it is a purposeful activity, forms a definite part of the new curriculum. There are several methods of selecting projects, namely:

1. Whatever is spontaneously expressed by the children.
2. Find an objective in life which is desirable to attain, arranging it in order corresponding as closely as possible to the changing and progressive interests and capabilities of children.
3. The ideal method is that which would confront the spontaneous expression and tendency to activities of children with conditions of environment which would themselves stimulate and determine the direction, form, and content of the project.

It will not be constructed to mean that with primary children the project method shall be used to an extreme for this is one of the dangers of the project method. It should be used only to stimulate free activity.²

1. Stomzand and McKee. The Progressive Primary Teacher. P. 31
 2. Bonser, F. G. The Elementary School Curriculum. Pp-89-90

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTIONS OF THE OLD AND NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The New Educational Program:- The background of the new education has been planned. The disciplinarian has been set against the active school of child's growth. The two schools are before us. We must explore deeply the difference between them and the significance of these differences. How shall the activities and materials of instructions be organized to guarantee maximum child growth? "The curriculum committee of the National Society for the study of Education phased it, "A maximum of life likeness to the learner." According to the new psychology, learning is not a passive process but an assimilative process.¹ Therefore, the new school has proposed a novel program of work. The difference from those of the old school shall be seen in the captions. Typical

TYPICAL CAPTIONS OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Representative of Centers of Interest and Unit of Work	Representative of School Subjects
Language Art	Reading
Reading Phonetic	Writing
Social Relation	Arithmetic
Science and Mathematics	English or Language
Home and Vocational Arts	History
Creative and Recreative	Spelling

1

Rugg, C. H. and Shumaker. The Child Centered School. Pp 68-70

From these captions it is plainly seen that the traditional school, with its barren environment and philosophy, could not stimulate desirable social activities and habits. Its failure was noticeably seen in the primary schools since the beginner's nature demands careful guidance because he comes to school with five or six years behind him of home and play which has permitted him to be free. The primary group as a whole enters school with differences developed according to home environments in which these differences must be guided, corrected and developed."

The vocabulary of the activity school resounds with centers of interest, creative activity, pupil enterprise, self initiated undertakings, open forums and debates, experimentation in shops, kitchen laboratories, studio research in library and fields. These activities in the new school, however, are conspicuously absent in the official program of the traditional school. ¹ In the passive school, knowledge is assumed to precede use. Knowledge must be acquired before applications are made. Dynamic use has little place in the traditional passive school. ²

The Child's Interest as the Basis of the New Educational Program:-

The new school is setting up a program of work which has a personal connection with the immediate life of the child. It starts from needs and interests rather than academic subjects. The plan of organizing the curriculum around units of pupil activity gives for a broader and wide spreading educational achievement than the dry logical arrangement of subjects. The new school program represents a new departmentalization, of knowledge which includes a broader view of racial experiences.

1 Rugg, C. H. & Shumaker. The Child Centered School. Pp 68-71

2 Rugg, C. H. & Shumaker. The Child Centered School Pp 70-72

The old school spent its time and energy in drilling pupils into a state of passable efficiency in minimal essentials. The new school treats minimal essentials by skills. The new schools have had greater success in teaching them than has the old school.

Opinions of Educators:- It must not be understood that the "Activity" program has not met with opposition, for many educators and teachers of the traditional school have been reluctant to accept the practice and the theory. This may be attributed to their misunderstanding of the purpose and objectives of the new program.

A review of the principles upon which activity is built shows that it is not intended that the subject matter must be eliminated altogether, as advocated by the extremists.

1

Quoting from Kilpatrick: "The school is a place for actual experiences. This does not mean, as some have seemed to think, that experiences of others are to be set aside--far from it."

2

Horn contends: "The difficulty with the present course of study is not so much that it is organized by subjects as that the contents of these subjects, and the relation between them, is not right. It is in failure to relate the subjects both in content and organization to life."

3

Dewey, himself, in starting his laboratory school sought equipment suited to meet the hygienic, artistic and educational needs of pupils. Dewey defined education as: "That reconstruction, or reorganization of experiences which added to the meaning of experiences and which increase

1

Mead, C. D. and Orth, F. W. The Transitional School. p 33

2

Ibid. P 34

3

Rugg & Shumaker. The Child Centered School. p 40-41

ability to add to the course of subsequent experiences." He discarded the widely prevalent concepts of formal education; for example: "education for the future" but substituted the simple formula of active learning and reconstruction of experiences. He accounted for the democratic conception of education by showing that the reconstruction of experiences may be social as well as individual.¹

On the other hand were the protagonists of a more orderly type of education who condemned the whole philosophy of the child activity school because of the overt practices which they regarded as mere educational anarchy. Furthermore, the phrasing of free education theories is not always clearly seen and understood by the teachers who put them into practice in the school room.

Careful understanding of the meaning of the newer education will lead one to understand that it doesn't encourage introduction of the extremist, fads and frills, but rather intends to strike out artificiality and barren formality from the school and classroom.

1 Rugg, H. & Shumaker, A. The Child Centered School. p 40-41

CHAPTER III

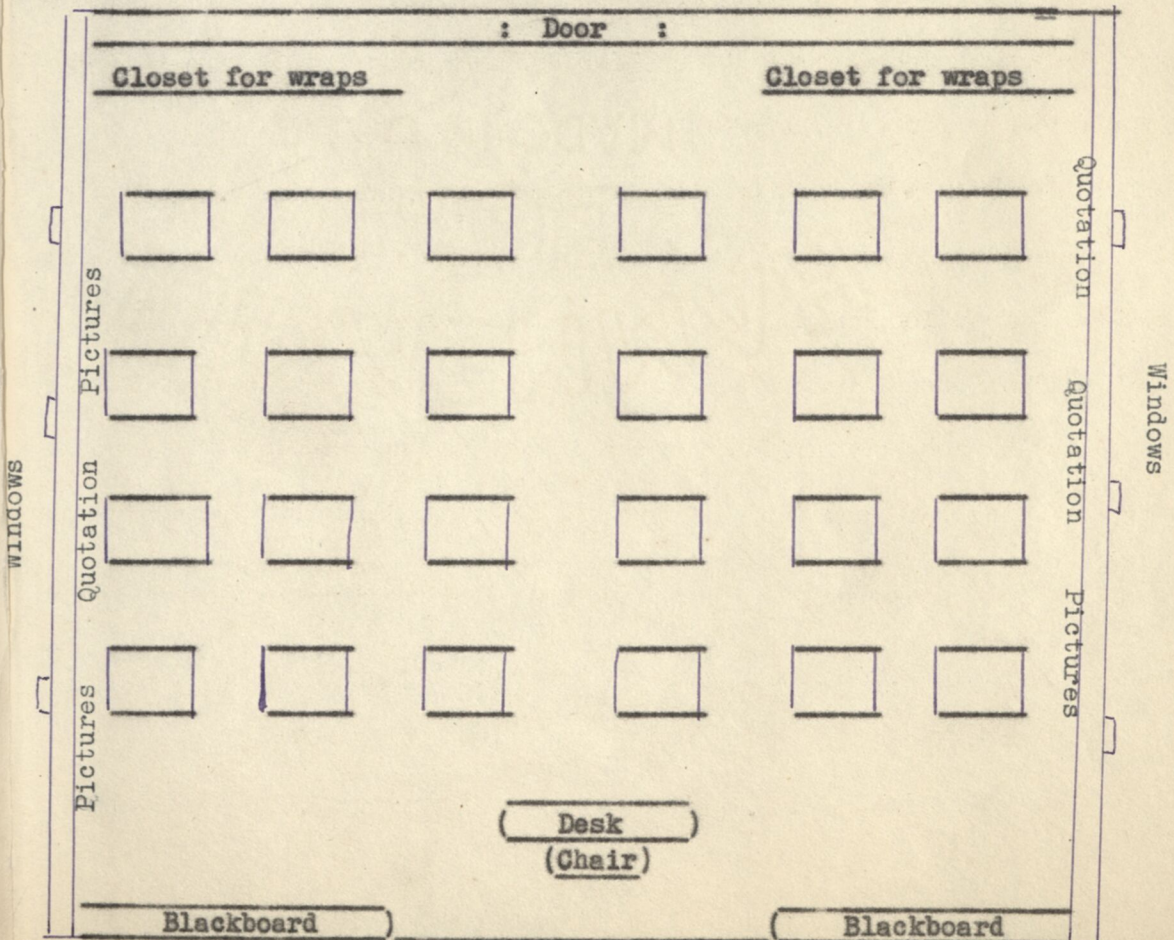
ACTUAL EXPERIENCES IN THE OLD AND NEW EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

The Traditional School: Having clearly defined the new or activity school program, the question arises "Can the rural teachers put the activity program into operation and how?"

The program should certainly operate in the rurals as well as in towns and cities, but the rural teacher must first accept this program as a part of her philosophy of education.

As a rural teacher, in formulating this new program the writer found it necessary to first examine her own traditional methods and determine whether or not she was securing results. The following is a set up of a traditional schoolroom:

TRADITIONAL SCHOOLROOM



A course of study was given to the teachers by the County Superintendent, outlining the subjects to be taught in each grade, and the teacher was obliged to go by the outline.

Equipment and Use:- The equipment consisted mainly of the daily schedule, pictures of great men, Benjamin Franklin; Proverbs, nailed seats, double seats (not adjustable), switches in the corner, blackboards, crayon and erasers. The room was quite barren and this barrenness could be felt in the tiresomeness of each day. The arrangement of the small windows made the light in the room poor. The pictures of great men were used in the schoolroom as an incentive for the children to pattern their lives by them.

DAILY PROGRAM OF THE TRADITIONAL SCHOOL

Begin	Close	Time	Primers	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade
9:00	9:15	15		DEVOTIONAL EXERCISE		
9:15	9:30	15	Reading	Study	Study	Study
9:30	9:50	20	Study	Reading	Study	Study
9:50	10:10	20	Study	Study	Reading	Study
10:10	10:30	20	Study	Study	Study	Reading
10:30	10:45	15	RECESS			
10:45	11:00	15	Numbers	Study	Study	Study
11:00	11:15	15	Study	Numbers	Study	Study
11:15	11:35	20	Study	Study	Numbers	Study
11:35	12:00	25		Study	Study	Arithmetic
12:00	1:00	60	NOON			
1:00	1:15	15	Read	Study	Study	Study
1:15	1:30	15	Study	Reading	Study	Study
1:30	1:45	15	Study	Study	Nature Study	Study
1:45	2:10	25				English
2:10	2:15	5	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
2:15	2:30	15	Writing	Writing	Writing	Health
2:30	2:45	15	RECESS			
2:45	3:00	15	Drawing	Drawing	Spelling	Studying
3:00	3:15	15				Spelling
3:15	3:30	15				Geography

Methods:- Under this traditional type of class schedule, the day's work was more or less uniform. For reading lessons the children were all placed in one line and each stood until his turn to read came. The child at the end of the row was quite tired and listless when his turn came.

The spelling lesson was carried out in similar manner. The children were lined up against the wall and words were called off to them. If the child missed three words he was whipped in the hand. For all other learning, topics, questions and answers were used in a formal manner. Books and formal drills were used almost exclusively and the child was not given the opportunity of active participation. The work day was crowded.

The learning of the A B C's was the chief consideration for the primary children. The children were taught these until they could recite them both forward and backwards.

The lesson, in its assignment, preparation and recitation, was the vital point under consideration. The lesson was assigned from the text book and the child was to have it learned by the next day or received punishment. Learning was forced by threats and punishments. The children were given plenty of time for studying but received little or no supervision.

Health was taught through definitions and definite health rules, such as:

Brush teeth twice a day

Drink four glasses of water daily

No practical work in health was carried out. The same formal routine of work was carried out daily. The children played whatever games they decided to play. No supervision was given on the playground.

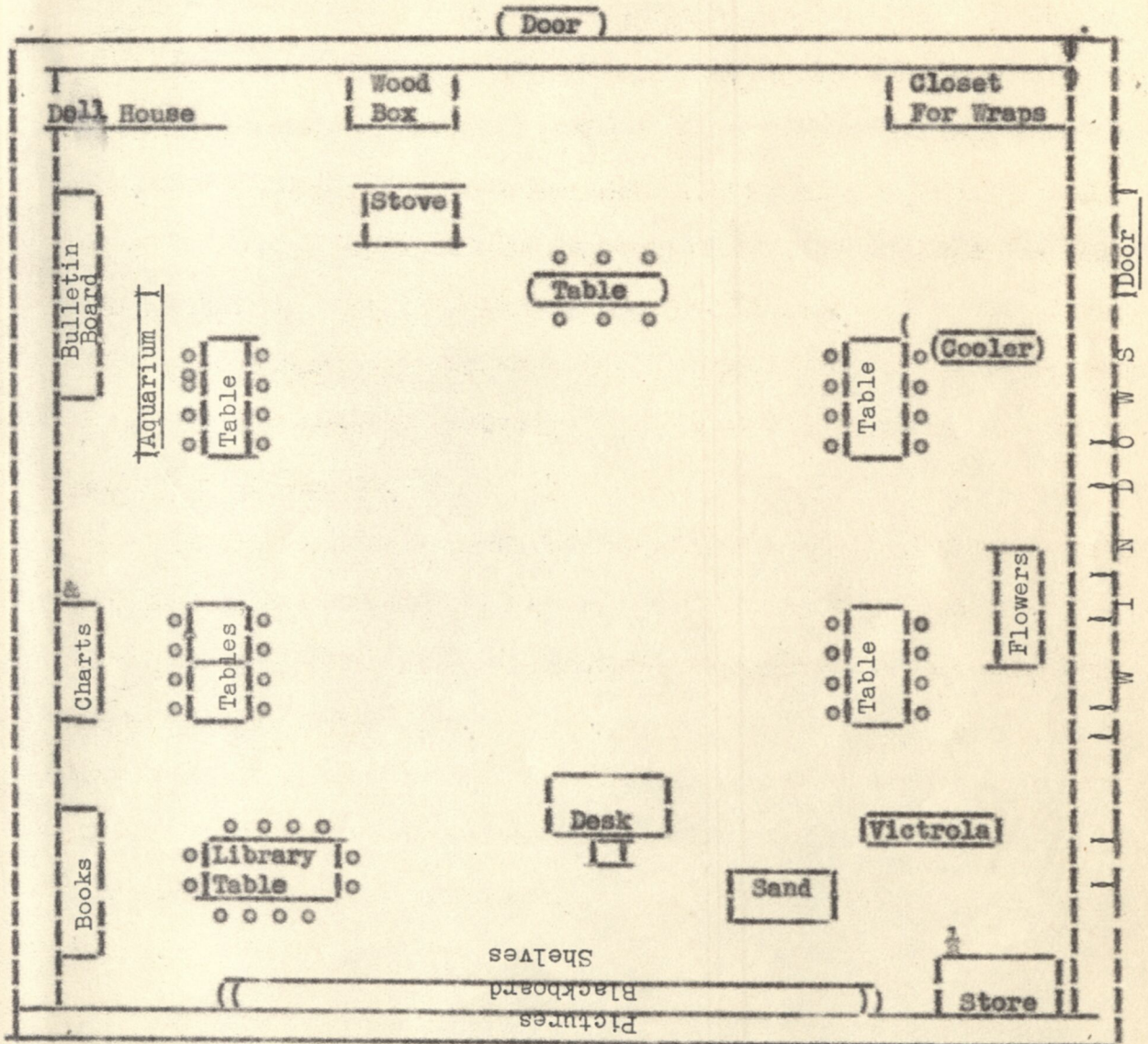
It is easy to see that satisfactory results could not be secured under such methods.

The children often played hookey from school and those that came did so because parents forced them. The children were inattentive and listless. They became as artificial as their education, lacking self independence, initiative, and understanding because they were forced to keep a book before them. They often used the book to hide mischievous acts such as making faces, spitball throwing and note writing. These things often led to severe punishments which often made the children resentful.

The Activity School:- The rural school as well as any elementary school can be a place where children pursue their own interests and develop new interests.

In this activity school outlined the children are able to have a normal life, experiences and learning of all types is stimulated. The organization of the program of activities here presented includes both subjects and units of work.

AN ACTIVITY SCHOOLROOM



A MODERN RURAL PRIMARY ROOM

Equipment and Use:- The primary child comes from the home which has furnished nearly all of his experiences. Therefore, the schoolroom should be made home like and the equipments should be those things that will help him connect the home to the school.

The health and comfort of the child should also be considered in equipping the schoolroom, as the primary child must have plenty of fresh air, sunshine, light and activity.

For these reasons this activity school is equipped with the following essentials:

- Available floor space
- Sand table
- Doll corner
- Reading circle
- Charts
- Pictures
- Bulletin boards
- Primary chairs
- Individual lockers
- Clay and paint
- Sewing materials
- Toys
- Books
- Balls
- Aquarium
- Pencil sharpener
- U. S. Flag
- Clock
- Thermometer
- Screw driver
- Toy money
- Number drill cards
- Scissors
- Paper cutter
- Victrola
- Records
- Drawing construction materials
- Colored crayons
- Beads for stringing
- Kindergarten tables
- Flower pots and stands, etc.

A part of the permanent equipment is furnished by the Board of Trustees. Different means are put forth for obtaining other equipment

Money is raised by giving plays and entertainments. Much waste material is used, such as; orange crates, pasteboard boxes, cigar boxes, spools, empty cartoons for supplying the store, ordering free material and a number of other waste materials. The material is used for making furniture, counting devices, toys, booklets, chairs and many teaching aids.

ACTIVITY SCHOOL PROGRAM

Time in Minutes	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Time Allotted
9:00 9:20		INSPECTION HEALTH		20 Min.
9:20 10:20		Language ARTS		60 Min.
10:20 10:30		PHONETICS		10 Min.
10:30 10:45		SUPERVISED PLAY		15 Min.
10:45 11:45		MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE		60 Min.
11:45 12:00		GENERAL ASSEMBLY DEVOTIONAL EXERCISES		15 Min.
12:00 1:00		SUPERVISED LUNCH AND PLAY		60 Min.
1:00 1:15		REST PERIOD		15 Min.
1:15 2:15		SOCIAL STUDIES		60 Min.
2:15 2:30		SUPERVISED PLAY		15 Min.
2:30 3:35		RECREATIVE AND CREATIVE ARTS		65 Min.
3:35 3:45		DISMISSAL		10 Min.

This program of the activity school consists of longer intervals. The activities are more varied within these longer periods. The activity is related and therefore the pupils are afforded a greater opportunity for accomplishing their purposes.

This program is flexible and the lessons are often changed to meet the needs.

Individual and group study, supervised and unsupervised, receives most of the time. The week is used as the unit of time. Testing to determine results is not like the old question-answer method for seeing how many facts the children have memorized, but to determine what the children can do about what they know. The lesson is well planned. It is worked out into units. Lesson plans are used for each day and week, yet not stereotyped so that it may be changed and altered.

In carrying out this daily schedule the unit plan is used and problems and projects are used in carrying out these units. The units vary according to the character of subject matter and controlling educational objectives.

Through close association with the rural child, and having a knowledge of their physical, mental and moral state, units can be selected intelligently.

1

The record of the unit is kept by the following outline:

- I. Bases for the Unit.
- II. Statement of Objectives of the Unit.
- III. How Unit Was Chosen.

Other Units That Might Be Used

1

The Texas Curriculum Revision Movement

IV. Material Used

V. 1. Approach: Introduction of Unit. Immediate interest of pupils used.

2. Other approaches which might have been used.

VI. 1. Development of Unit.

2. Other Means of Development Which Might Have Been Used.

VII. 1. Culminating Activity

2. Other Culminating Activities That Might Have Been Used

VIII. Evaluating

IX. Recommendations for Changes in the Future.

X. Articulation or Correlation With Other Subjects

(Statement of Skills Developed or Subjects Covered)

1. Mathematics

2. Language Arts

3. Science

4. Physical Education and Health

5. Fine Arts

6. Industrial Education and Home Making.

7. Social Studies

8. Other Subjects.

XI. Administrative Aspects records some of the units carried out were Children's Pets, Health Campaign, Grocery Store, Home Life, Cotton, Birds, Transportation, Flowers, Animals on the Farm, Postal Service and a number of others.

BETTER HOME LIFE

A UNIT

Basis:- This unit was chosen because a survey was made and found that the average Negro lives in an unpainted three room house.

General Objective:

1. To improve the food habits of the average rural home.
2. To encourage the improvement of the personal appearance of members of the family.
3. To develop an appreciation for better home comforts.
4. To help the rural people to utilize their leisure time to the best advantage.
5. To stimulate a desire in the rural family to raise the social and economic standard of living

Purpose:- The purpose of this unit is to study a means of improving present conditions.

LESSON PLAN

Title -- Better Home Life

Grades - 1st, 2nd, 3d

Time -- 9:20 - 10:20

Subject -Language Arts

Topic -- Improving Old Furniture

Procedure-Review Problem:- Name the different kinds of furniture found in the home. Name some ways of improving old furniture. I will write them on the board. "Have you ever seen anyone improve old furniture?" Tell the class about it.

Assignment:- Bring into class tomorrow pictures of different

types of furniture. Make booklets. Make sentences about the furniture.

The children were able to enjoy and receive benefits from these units. The pupils are permitted to have home and school projects in groups and individually. These projects consisted of reading, practice, reporting, securing information, solving problems, creating and constructing.

Projects and plans are made on the basis of children's thoughts and expressions. For example: "I went on a trip and the children asked questions concerning my traveling stops, and other things concerning my trip. On the basis of these questions we constructed a train made of tables, cans and cardboard large enough for the children to get into. A ticket agent was selected, also engineer, brakeman and conductor. The children bought tickets to the town where they desired to go.

Activity plays an important place in carrying out these units and projects, yet this does not mean that individual drill is eliminated, for in the teaching of arithmetic, reading and other fundamentals, individual drill is still necessary.

In primary projects the learning should not be made too incidental.

The danger of this procedure in abandoning all formal learning may be illustrated here in the case of reading. If the systematic formal instruction necessary to teach beginners reading is made entirely incidental to the other typical activities made possible in a reorganized room with its varied equipment it would be absolutely certain that the reading would be accidental instead of incidental. Hence systematic drill techniques are also used.

The children are given a chance for greater participation and are

allowed to do certain things on their own initiative. The playground too, plays an important part in the development of the primary children. During the recess period the children are supervised, teaching them how to play, and games that should be played according to their ages and grades. In these games children are developed physically, mentally, socially and morally.

Punishment though not needed as often as in the traditional school consists of private reproof and personal criticism, suspension, deprivation of privileges, detention, and making restitutions.

Results:- The results and values of the newer methods and procedures are easily seen in the children themselves.

In the first place the children manifest a great interest in school attendance even in the absence of parents encouragement and commands. School attendance is quite regular and after getting to school the children are interested in learning and developing. They are forward in questioning. They develop initiative and self reliance.

The discipline itself is indicative of the value of the new education. The children are kept so busy and are so interested in the things that they are doing that they have little or no time for wrong doing.

Someone has rightly said that "An idle brain is the devil's workshop" and to this may be added that any brain is idle where there is no interest.

With the different methods of punishment as opposed to corporal punishment, better results are secured and the children adhere to rules and regulations more readily and easily.

SUMMARY

Summing up then, the new learning environment is more attractive, interesting and more stimulating. For the primary child it bridges the gap from home to school.

Maximum benefits are given to the child by his own experiences. Activities and the development of skills, and interest is maintained.

For the teacher the maximum results are secured from minimum work. It permits a natural situation for her, it helps her to understand and respect her pupils, and, therefore makes her work more enjoyable. Management is made easier and discipline is not a serious problem as before.

Every teacher interested in elevating the teaching profession and those whose lives she must touch, should first become acquainted with the new philosophy and accept it as her own working philosophy so that the needs and interests of pupils may be met.

However, the "Activity" Program is dangerous in the hands of a teacher who does not understand it and how it must be put into operation

One educator remarked that "It was quite discouraging on walking into a primary classroom to find the teacher attempting to put over a unit without proper understanding and knowledge."¹

The criticism then does not really rest on the "Activity" Program but on unpreparedness of the teachers.

1

Rugg, H. and Shumaker, A. The Child Centered School. p 68-69

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